

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Executive Director of the Ocean County Political Party Pleads Guilty to Promoting and Facilitating Bribery

(More)

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TRENTON – The executive director of the Ocean County Democratic Party pleaded guilty in federal court today, admitting that he accepted two corrupt cash payments from a cooperating government witness in exchange for a promise to make introductions to public officials who might assist the cooperating witness with development interests, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Alfonso L. Santoro, 70, of Beachwood, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Joel A. Pisano to a one-count Information that charges him with a violation of the federal Travel Act. Judge Pisano released the defendant on a \$50,000 bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for March 1.

Santoro had not been previously charged, and today was his first appearance in court. His guilty plea comes as part of the same investigation that resulted in bribery and money laundering charges against 44 individuals on July 23.

At his plea hearing, Santoro admitted that, on May 18, 2008, he accepted a \$5,000 corrupt cash payment from a government cooperating witness (“CW”) at a Toms River restaurant. Santoro said the payment was in exchange for his anticipated assistance in facilitating introductions and corrupt payments to public officials in Ocean County who could purportedly exercise their influence in favor of the CW’s real estate development interests.

Santoro admitted that, during a phone call on July 17, 2008, he arranged for the CW to meet with a political party official (“the Individual”) who Santoro said could assist the CW in obtaining certain development approvals on a property located in the Waretown section of Ocean Township. Santoro admitted that he accepted an additional \$1,500 cash payment from the CW on Aug. 10, 2008, in Atlantic City. During this meeting, Santoro informed the CW that he and the Individual would arrange for the CW to meet an elected official who served in the New Jersey General Assembly and could assist the CW in obtaining development approvals.

The charge to which Santoro pleaded guilty – using interstate facilities (a cell phone) in furtherance of a bribery scheme – carries a maximum statutory penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Pisano will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant’s criminal history, if any, and other factors, including acceptance of responsibility. The judge has wide discretion and is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all of that time.

Fishman credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, and IRS Criminal Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge William P. Offord, for the investigation of Santoro and the other defendants. Fishman also thanked the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Luis A. Valentin, for their assistance in the investigation.

The case against Santoro is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Gramiccioni of the Office's Special Prosecutions Division.

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Defense Attorney: Angelo R. Bianchi, Esq. Bloomfield